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## Induction Hon. John G. Connor, New York State Supreme Court Justice

Roger J. Miner '56

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Induction of Hon. John G. Connor as  
a New York State Supreme Court Justice

I am happy to join with your family, friends and colleagues in congratulating you on your induction as a Justice of the New York Supreme Court. I welcome you into the fraternity of judges and wish you a happy career on the bench. I am sure that you will be a great credit to the judiciary. Although this day is tinged with sadness because of the passing of your beloved mother, it also is an important and happy day for the people of Columbia County because once again we have a resident Supreme Court Judge in the county and this time we didn't have to wait 40 years!! It is most convenient to the citizenry of the county to have a Supreme Court Judge in resident at the county seat. I recall Saul Finger coming into my chambers late one Friday afternoon to tell me that there was a couple outside waiting to be married. I told him to notify them to come back on Monday. He notified them accordingly and returned with this message: "Judge, they would like you to say a few words to tide them over the weekend." That's what I mean by convenience!!!

Seven years ago, and it seems like yesterday, I stood here to take my oath of office as a Supreme Court Justice. Just as you must have some trepidation today, I had a great deal of trepidation then. It is a fear of the unknown -- we really don't know what we are getting into when we move from practicing law to judging. The general practice of law in Hudson does not prepare one for the variety of cases and problems judges face in the seven-county area where you will serve as a Supreme Court Judge. the cases that will concern you will include questions of law not

yet settled, complicated factual issues involving the state and its agencies, and matters where millions of dollars lie in the balance. I do not tell you these things to intimidate you but to excite you with the possibilities of your important office. Judging is, after all, a learning experience and a fascinating one at that. I suppose that's why the supervisors put your chambers in a schoolhouse!

The change from advocate to Judge bridges a large gap. As a lawyer, you strive mightily for one side. As a Judge, you must choose between contending points of view and each side may have a great deal of merit. I was practically panic stricken on hearing my first motion. After hearing the plaintiff's lawyer, I thought he should prevail. After hearing the defendant's lawyer argue, I thought he should prevail. Some of our decisions are really close calls. Also, as new judges, we sometimes have difficulty in keeping the proper demeanor on the bench. We want to act like judges are supposed to act and we want the lawyers to think we know what we're doing. I was assigned my first term for matrimonial cases in Kingston shortly after I was sworn in here. My first case involved a man who was suing his wife for divorce because of cruel and inhuman treatment. Holding his right arm in a peculiar way, the man testified that he did so because his wife had shot him there with a shotgun!! After putting forth this testimony, the case being uncontested, the lawyer announced: "Your Honor, the plaintiff rests." I then decided to use a phrase that I had heard judges use before: "Is that all your proof, counselor?" I didn't realize at first why the lawyer, upon hearing my question, looked like was about to faint.

Seven years ago, when I was inducted, I got some advice here from two experienced lawyers -- your father and mine. Your father told me never to forget I was a lawyer and my father told me to have patience and understanding. I don't have enough seniority to give you much advice, but I know from being acquainted with you for twenty years that you have the makings of a fine judge. You are patient and courteous; you have an even temper and a sense of humor; you have common sense and an understanding of the human condition; and you are ready to learn, and I tell you there is an enormous lot to learn. You are a gentleman and I don't think you'll ever forget you were a lawyer. One cannot ask for more in a judge.

There are two bits of advice I cannot resist giving you. One pertains to a judge's participation in the trial by questioning witnesses. Don't do it!! Let the lawyers do it -- it's their job even if you think you can do it better. My father's favorite story is about the judge who questioned a witness extensively and then was told by the lawyer: "Judge, I don't mind if you question the witness, but don't lose the case for me." It was Lord Bacon who said: "an overspeaking judge is no well tuned cymbal." My second bit of advice is more personal. As you know, I have been a tennis player for many years and you have only recently come upon the tennis scene. The rumor in indoor tennis circles is that you have agreed to play doubles every Tuesday at 5:30 pm.m, starting this month. You'll never make it at 5:30 and my advice is to cancel the appointment at once.

Good Luck, Old Buddy!!